WHIRRAKEE

January/February 2005 Vol. 26 No. 1

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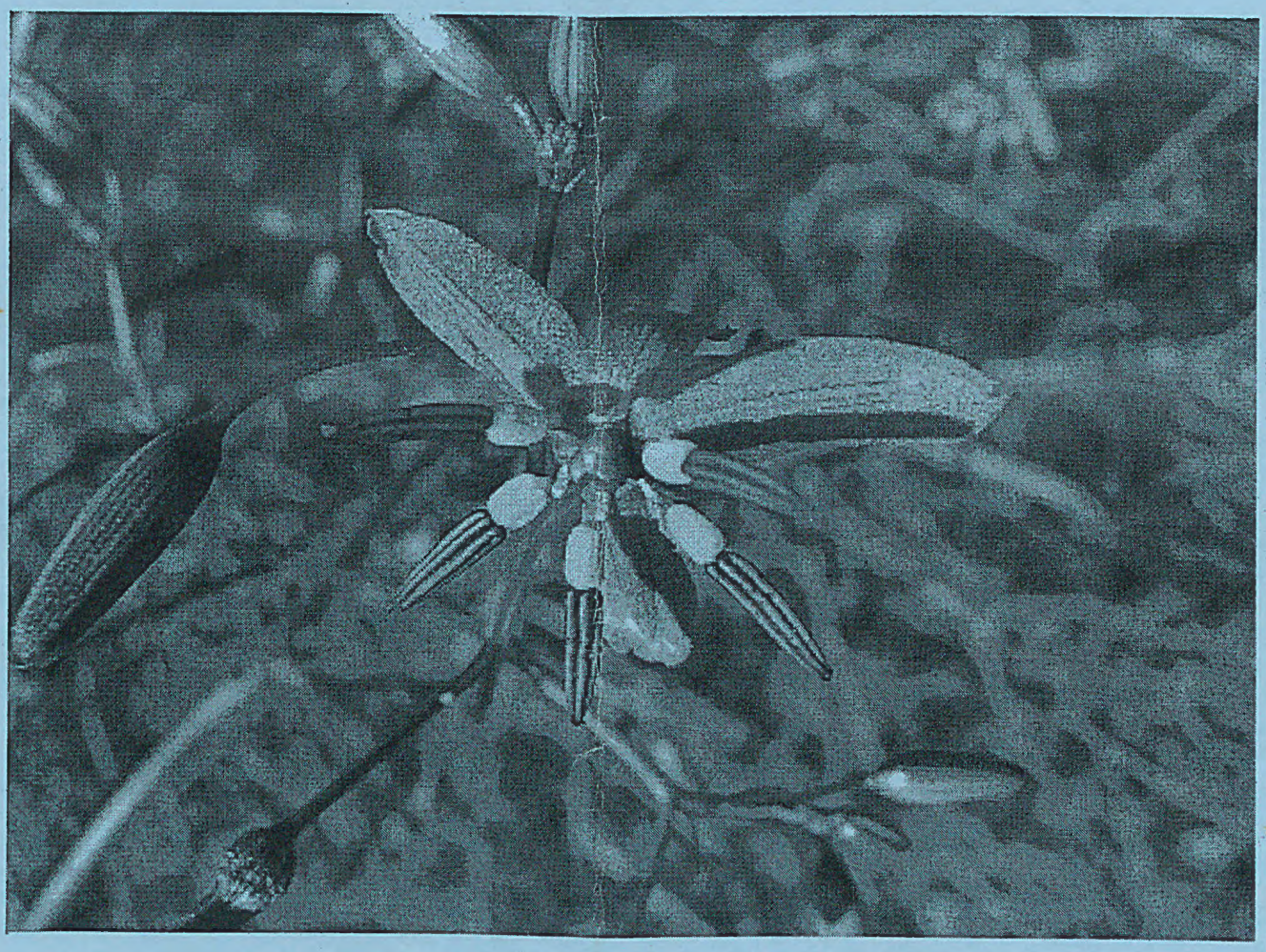

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552
ISSN 0812-423X

Office Bearers for 2004 - 2005

President	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Senior Vice President	Stuart Fraser	12 Bambara Close, Bendigo	
Junior Vice President	vacant		
Secretary	Bill Holsworth	13 Nabilla Crs, Bendigo e-mail:wholsworth@bigpond.com	5443 4063
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	Jan Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
Treasurer	Stuart Fraser		
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Excursion organiser	done by the committee		
Syllabus organiser	Rod Orr	2 Cockerel Court, Bendigo	5443 5668
Librarian	Diana Collier	31 Milroy Street, Bendigo	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Matthew Comer	46 Railway Place, Goornong	5432 2380
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis		0407 427179
Whirrakee contact	Sabine Wilkens	82 Somerville Street, Bendigo e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Rob Moors, Maurie Lewis, Glenise Moors, Rod Orr, Bob Ruddick, and there are 3 vacancies.

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has one active group that meets regularly (the Fauna Study Group) and other groups that meet at irregular intervals.

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.
Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: This group has field excursions and the occasional lecture evening. Please consult the *Whirrakee* for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5449 3479.
To propose meetings or excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

Front Cover Photographer: Liz Martin
This photogenic lily is *Dianella revoluta*, the Black-anther flax lily. It was photographed in Mandurang late October last year. The pollinating agent is unknown to me (please let me know if you have observed any potential agents on these flowers) but it looks very much like a buzz-pollinated plant....continued on back page

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 26, No.1, January/February 2005

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
Another year of Whirrakee. I bet, like me, many people had such busy holidays that we all need another, more quiet break now.
The first edition of the year is usually a skinny one but let's hope that you will all have wonderful holiday observations to send in the next couple of weeks. I am pleased though that the discussion of burning the Jackass Flat Flora Reserve is continued in this issue.
There are also a couple of repeat articles in this edition which I thought deserved a re-run. If you don't want to see these again, please submit some interesting articles for the next 10 edition of 2005.

Letter to John Thwaites, Minister for Sustainability and Environment

30th November 2004

Dear Minister
As a person who has spent many years of my life getting to know the box-ironbark, I have been very angry these last two years when the DSE has launched a devastating attack by fire on one of Bendigo's premier conservation reserves: namely, the Jackass Flat Conservation Reserve. When I saw your photograph in the Bendigo Advertiser article "DSE gears up for fire" (Advertiser 24 Nov, 2004), I determined to inform you of the folly of the actions of the DSE in treating the nature reserve in this manner. Attached in an article I have written which, I believe, gives credence to the fact that it is folly indeed to perpetrate this destruction, and I sincerely hope that you will put an end to it

Clive Fisher

Fire in the Box-Ironbark

There is a common belief that all Australian landscapes are fire prone. This belief, together with the heated outcry following the disastrous fires in north-east Victoria in early 2003, seems to have led to the burning of Zone 1 firebreaks across (1) the remarkable area of box-ironbark in Bendigo known previously as the Jackass Flat Flora Reserve, and now, I believe, called the Jackass Flat Nature Conservation Reserve, and (2) the extensive remnant of box-ironbark and mallee known as the Whipstick. The Jackass Flat burns, which included the very destructive burn on April 7 2004, and the burn on October 26 2004 in a different section, are a part of the 8,054 hectares planned to be burnt in the Bendigo Fire District by the Department of Sustainability and Environment as described in their 2004/05 Fire Operations Plan for the Bendigo Fire District.

Fuel Management Zones are deemed to be in four zones, the Zone 1 category being the zone where the under-storey is considered by the Department of Sustainability and Environment to have the heaviest fuel load, and therefore a permanent strip must be burned and kept relatively free of under-storey, by repeated burning. This, we are told, is to protect private property adjacent to these reserves. These burns also have the effect of lessening the area of reserve to a great extent, especially in the Jackass Flat Reserve, and the loss of bio-diversity. However, there are people who have spent many years in the box-ironbark who believe that the box-ironbark is fire-retardant rather than fire-prone. I am one of these people.

I brought my family to live in Bendigo in 1967. One of the attractions that brought us here was the large area of box-ironbark surrounding the town. Through all the years I have dwelt in this city, I have taken my family on many excursions into these forests. I still take my grandchildren for walks and excursions here. In all the time I have lived and worked in Bendigo I have not known a wildfire of any significance to affect the box iron-bark forests here.

In 1998 I commenced a degree at La Trobe University, Bendigo. As part of our learning, we students were asked to choose an area of bush to study. I chose the Jackass Flat Flora Reserve. Since early 1998 to the present day, I have been visiting this reserve at least once a week. In the year 2000, I led two walks through the reserve for Spring in the Bendigo Bush. On one of these walks, I met Shelley Cohn, who is as passionate about saving the reserve from any degradation as I am. The hard-hitting speech Shelley made at the Bendigo Field Naturalists meeting on 10 November 2004 attests to this.*

One of my university instructors, Marc Bellette, while studying for his thesis on xanthorrhea, wanted to know the locations of all the remnant stands of xanthorrhea in Victoria. There is an extensive stand of xanthorrhea in the box-ironbark, close to Bendigo, many of which are in excess of two metres tall from ground level to the growing green head, and all the trunks are covered with the dead 'skirt' to ground level, with no obvious indication of their ever having experienced fire *(see photo next page)*. However, when I showed Marc these xanthorrheas, he lifted the bottom of the skirts of several of the taller ones, and we discovered a ring of burnt trunk at ground level, which was approximately 12 centimetres wide. Considering that the xanthorrhea is a very slow-growing organism, Marc pointed out that fire had not touched these grass-trees since the mid-1800s, and mentioned that Edward M. Curr wrote of a fire in his publication of 1883, and from it I quote: 'During the months of November and December, 1843, a fire had run over Purnewong, Coragorag, Gargarro,

Colbinabbin, Wongulta (now pronounced *one halter*), Goberip, Redcastle and Rushworh country...' (Curr, 1883, p. 147). Curr also wrote that the fire was probably lit by human hands (Curr, 1883, p. 147).

As fire has not touched this area of box-ironbark, of which these xanthorrheas are an integral part, since 1843 (and they were still unburned when I inspected them on Wednesday 10-11-04), I think that this goes a long way towards proving that fire in the box-ironbark is a rarity, and not a common occurrence. Therefore, it must be considered unnecessary to burn great swathes of the remnant areas, as has been done in recent months in the Jackass Flat Nature Conservation Reserve, and previously in the Whipstick. The Department of Sustainability and Environment needs to urgently do a complete rethink of their fire plans for the box-ironbark forests.

Reference:

Curr, E. M. (1883) *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*. Melbourne: George Robertson.

Department of Sustainability and Environment (nd) *Fire Operations Plan Bendigo Fire District 2004/05 - 2006-07*.(np) Department of Sustainability and Environment

**Editor's Note:*
although page 4 of the minutes of the general (10 November) meeting (see December *Whirrakee*) states that Clive and Sally spoke about the Jackass Flora Reserve issue, Clive wants it to be known that had <u>not</u> actually spoken on that occasion)

More about Jackass Flat after Shelley's Cohn's article

by Peter Ellis

The survey I carried out about 1974, give or take a year earlier or so. I saw the area as an adjunct to the proposed Whipstick Park and attempted to tie it in with this by using the legend of numbered plants that Frank Robbins used in his series 'Survey of the Whipstick' published in the Bendigo Naturalist from about 1967 to about 1973. Frank at the time I think was involved with Gondwanaland Guru's business and didn't have time to help with Jackass Flat, probably overseas in India or Madagascar. If there were any Jackass Flat plants not listed in the Whipstick, then I made up a number in sequence following the last of his Whipstick entries. The map and localities I compiled were quickly put together owing to the urgency of the situation to save the area and focused on anything of interest whether typical or outstanding, or just showy, not necessarily rare, although of course the latter received attention if possible. Also one of the streets, Crane from memory was later re-aligned from that indicated in my map. Jack Kellam helped by walking 'the block' and checking that my plant locations on the map were correct. He acknowledged they were reasonably spot on. I was lucky I had been with Frank on several occasions when he did the Whipstick surveys, so something must have gelled. At least this time I didn't have to drive a certain FJ round and round a gum tree to reach the nearest round figure on the odometer. Bob Allen was of enormous assistance in compiling the original plant list for the area.

I must say with despair it is totally dismal to learn in Shelley Cohn's article what has recently transpired with the desecration of the Flora Reserve. For what was all the effort by the residents of Jacob St, Shirley Mainstone's 'Save Our Bushland Group' (Shirley pictured in a recent Advertiser article on the elderly keeping up driving skills), The Bendigo Field Naturalists and others? The opposition might just as well have plonked Dai Gum San there afterall. Well if you want to save Jackass Flat, just sool Shirley Mainstone onto the aggravators.

A friend of mine learning of the latest, Geoff Murrell, who with wife Maree was on an excursion of mine through Jackass Flat in the 1970's commented to me after the spreading of

Maree's ashes at Kalimna Park Castlemaine last weekend, 'we need Cultural Police to deal effectively in this situation'. Well exactly! A community and groups such as ours and various allied individuals should be able to sue for millions of dollars for such ignorant desecration. I can understand in the wake of enormous wildfires for which the government rightly or wrongly was aimed blame (I do have other views) that some measures (hopefully sensible and not lynch gang style) may need to be put in place over the large tracts of state forest and national park. But where does the little piddling flora reserve stand for what it was set aside for if the measures adopted dictate its annihilation?

Is there any civilised view on these issues or are we still in the dark age of 'sack and burn'.

Like Victoria, I am not amused, and neither are the von Noltings!

The legend below belongs to Peter Ellis' map (on the right) which was completed during his survey. It has been separated out here for clarity.

Scale 1:5,000
2 Metre Contour intervals.

Bushland to be preserved at all costs.
Timber – Red Ironbark / Red Box
Shrubbery – Melaleuca decussata
Wildflowers – Bendigo wax, Calytrix, Parrot-Peas, Shrub Violet, Orchids etc.

Additional Species of interest

G Green Mallee (Euc. viridis)
15 Sticky Boronia, "stinky wax" (B. anemonifolia)
36 Bull-oak "Buloke" (Casuarina luehmannii)
43 Whirrakee wattle (Acacia williamsonii)
49 Violet Honey-myrtle (Melaleuca wilsonii)
71 Stiff Westringia (Westringia rigida)
78 Shrub violet (Hybanthus floribundus)
79 Star hair (Asterotriche linearis)
94 "Wild Cherry" (Cherry Ballart) (Exocarpus cupressiformis)
11 Goldfields Grevillea (Grev. dryophylla)
7 Angled Pigface (Carpobrotus aequilaterus)
32 Nodding Greenhood (Pterostylis nutans)
33 Common Correa (C. reflexa)
34 Drooping She-oak (Casuarina stricta)
35 Shrubby She-oak (Casuarina muelleriana)
36 Leafless Currant-bush (Leptomeria aphylla)
37 Scarlet Sun-dew (Drosera glanduligera)
38 Golden Pennants (Loudonia behrii)
39 Rustyhood (Pterostylis biseta)
40 Running Postman (Kennedya prostrata)
41 Rosy Baeckea (B. ramosissima)

Map of Jackass Flora reserve (early 1970s) showing 2m contour lines and plant species of interest. The original map has deeper shades of green for 'bushland to be preserved at all cost'. Shelley Cohn has since taken the original map to prepare another document in support of stopping the burning of this reserve.

Water Rats of the Loddon

by Keith Graham

Fishing is a wonderful relaxing, if time-consuming hobby that has given me many opportunities to observe birds and animals in their riverine environment.
One of these is the water rat, a native mammal but not a marsupial. They were once trapped for their fine pelts but have been on the protected list for many years. They could often be seen diving for mussels in the gravel beds of the Loddon. On surfacing, the rat would scramble onto a water level log, bite open the mussel, discarding the shell till the feeding platform and river bed was littered with evidence of its meal.
Over the last twenty years their numbers have declined steeply and the only reason I can think of is European Carp which invaded the river in the 1970s and will eat almost anything. If they, in fact, have eaten these small mussels, then, what was the water rat's staple diet would be now gone.
Hopefully our native fish that have been reintroduced into the river will get the upper hand over the carp and the water rat will be a common sight once again.

Plea for help finding Noisy Miner free remnants

Hi There,
My name is Jo Oldland. I'm a research assistant working within Assoc. Prof. Mike Clarke's 'Ornithology and Avian Conservation' group at La Trobe University. We are in the early stages of a three year project aiming to find a sustainable means of limiting the negative impact of domination of remnant native and planted woodland by the hyper-aggressive Noisy Miner.

One aspect of the study involves looking at how woodland remnants that are NOT dominated by Noisy Miners differ from those that are. Part of the study involves finding small woodland remnants (< 20 ha in area) that are free of Noisy Miners (or at least not dominated by them) within the range of the Noisy Miner within Victoria and NSW.

We would like to enlist the help of fellow ornithologists and bird watchers throughout Victoria and NSW to locate these remnants. So far the task is proving to be quite difficult, as these remnants are few and far between, and also likely to be located on private property.

Of particular interest to the study are remnants occurring within Box-Ironbark Forests; Riverine Grassy Woodlands; the Gippsland Plains Grassy Woodlands and the 'Box-Buloke' Plains Grassy Woodlands of Western Victoria.
Having said this, we would also be interested to learn of ANY Noisy Miner-free remnants within Victoria and NSW.

The remnants must be 'discreet areas', at least 50 m from other vegetated areas, although if connected remnants (via vegetation corridors etc.), free of Noisy Miners exist, we would be eager to learn of them too.

An additional requirement is that the overstorey must consist, at least partially, of eucalypt species.

We would really appreciate it if you could circulate this information to members within your organisation (or anywhere else deemed appropriate, for that matter!).

My contact details are: Jo Oldland
Department of Zoology La Trobe University
BUNDOORA VIC 3086
Ph: (03) 9479 1672
Mob: 0427 349 697
email: J.Oldland@latrobe.edu.au

With Thanks,
Jo Oldland.

South Eastern Australian Naturalists' Association
The next two Campouts.....

The Upper Goulburn FNC is planning an **Autumn Campout from Friday 11th March to Monday 14th March 2005**

The Upper Goulburn Field Naturalists Club invites you to attend the SEANA Autumn Campout situated in our beautiful farming, timber and tourist district, surrounded by wooded mountain and **close to picturesque Lake Eildon** and the winding Goulburn River. We are fortunate to have several National and State Parks close by and also a wealth of local small Reserves which support a great variety of birds all the year and many flowers in Spring.

Venue - Eildon Mountain Lodge is located 20km from Alexandra or 8km from Thornton at 515 Goulburn valley Highway. The actual Lodge is located behind the Eildon Holiday Resort, which is on the corner of the Goulburn valley Highway and the Snobs Creek Road.

Accommodation - The Lodge and a bunkhouse will accommodate up to 150 participants with car parking at your designated area. You will need to supply your own sleeping bags or sheet, doona/blankets, pillowcases and towels. (bottom sheets and pillows are provided). Camp participants have the use of the motel swimming pool.
Good motel units on site may be booked and paid for privately. Pone 03 5774 2415 for this option. please advise when booking hat you are attending the Field Naturalists Conference. Motel rooms are being held for us until 30th November 2004.

Catering - All meals provided from Friday dinner until Monday lunch. Special dietary requirements will be provided for and dining room in BYO with licenced premises on the site. Tea and coffee available as required.

Fuel is available at Alexandra and Eildon.

Facilities - There are no camp or caravan sites available at the Lodge. nearest are at Thornton Caravan Park. Phone 03 5773 2305, Eildon Caravan Park phone 0357742105, The Boulevard Caravan Park Eildon phone 03 5774 2128 or Blue Gums Caravan Park Back Road Eildon phone 03 5774 2567 (we advise immediate private booking if requiring a site).

Theme will be 'Exploring our Forests and Waterways'

Guest Speakers - Friday: Andy Miller (Chief Ranger, Parks Victoria, Eildon), Saturday: Dr Kevin Tolhurst (senior lecturer, Fire Ecology and Management, University of Melbourne), Sunday: speaker to be confirmed (Native Fish or Waterways).

Excursions - Will be lead by locals and visiting speakers into our forests at Eildon and Cathedral ranges Gobur, Alexandra and along parts of our Goulburn River and its tributaries. We are investigating an opportunity to participate in a 'behind the scenes' tour of the Snobs Creek Freshwater Discovery Centre. This would incur an additional fee and must be pre-booked.

Cost $174 for the full camp, $153 for the camp without the Friday night dinner, $20 registration fee (plus a fee for the possible tour at the Snobs Creek Discovery Centre). For BFNC members, these forms are available form the editor (S.Wilkens) or secretary (W.Holsworth). Contact numbers are on the inside front cover of the *Whirrakee*.

Bookings with full payment by 25th January 2005
Enquiries please direct to either Joan Edwards (Semmens), President, 20 Webster Street Alexandra 3714 phone 03 5772 1542 or Lorrain Pyke, Secretary, 149 Crystal Creek Road Alexandra 3714 phone 03 5772 1189.

2006 ANN Get-Together

Some time ago, we also received the first circular for the **2006 Australian Naturalists' Network Get-Together.** This will be hosted by SEANA and held in the Australian High Country from 16th January to 2nd February 2006.

Due to the pressure on accommodation during this time of year in the High Country, SEANA is looking for anybody who firmly knows that they will attending this event. If not enough people show interest at this stage, the accommodation cannot be booked.

If you are interested in responding at this stage, Bill Holsworth has copies of the response sheet required. This, along with a 50 dollar deposit needs to be sent off as soon as possible. The deposit money will be refunded should the get-together not go ahead due to lack of numbers.

It is estimated that the total cost will be about 1500 dollars for the 17 days (based on previous camps).

Bird Watch at Gunbower

Hello Everyone,

I just wanted to introduce myself, my name is Heid Magner and I will be working at North Central CMA as Project Officer on the Gunbower Forest Project with Emer Campbell.

I wanted to inform you all that we are currently encouraging the community to participate in a BirdWatch survey at Gunbower forest. We are trying to establish what colonial water birds are feeding and breeding in response to the Spring flood water.

Every observation we receive will be going into a prize draw to win dinner for two at Oscar W's Wharfside restaurant, valued at $100 and also receive a North Central 2005 Calendar.

Please forward this information onto to any bird enthusiast that you think would be interested. For further details please check out the web link or feel free to give me a call.

Kind regards Heidi

http://www.nccma.vic.gov.au/PDFs/General%20Publications/Bird%20Observation%20sheet.pdf

Heidi Magner
Project Officer - Gunbower Forest
North Central Catchment Management Authority T: 03 5440 1806
M:0408 580 830
F:03 5448 7148

Editor's note: If you are interested in this activity and cannot get the observation sheet from the website above, let me know and I will get a copy to you.

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meetings

Wednesday, February 9 7.30pm
Members are encouraged to bring their best holiday slides along.

Wednesday, March 9 7.30pm
Speaker to be determined (Rod Orr is currently finalising the speaker syllabus).

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm.
The following is a guide for the discussion topics for next year's meetings (subject to change).

Feb. 23rd - Reptiles
Mar.23rd - Echidna
Apr 27th - Symbiotic Relationships
May 25th - Termites
Jun 22nd - Koala
Jul 27th - Scat identification

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Bendigo Field Naturalists on the web

http://communitysites.impulse.net.au/bendigofieldnaturalists/fnats.html

Any comments are most welcome.

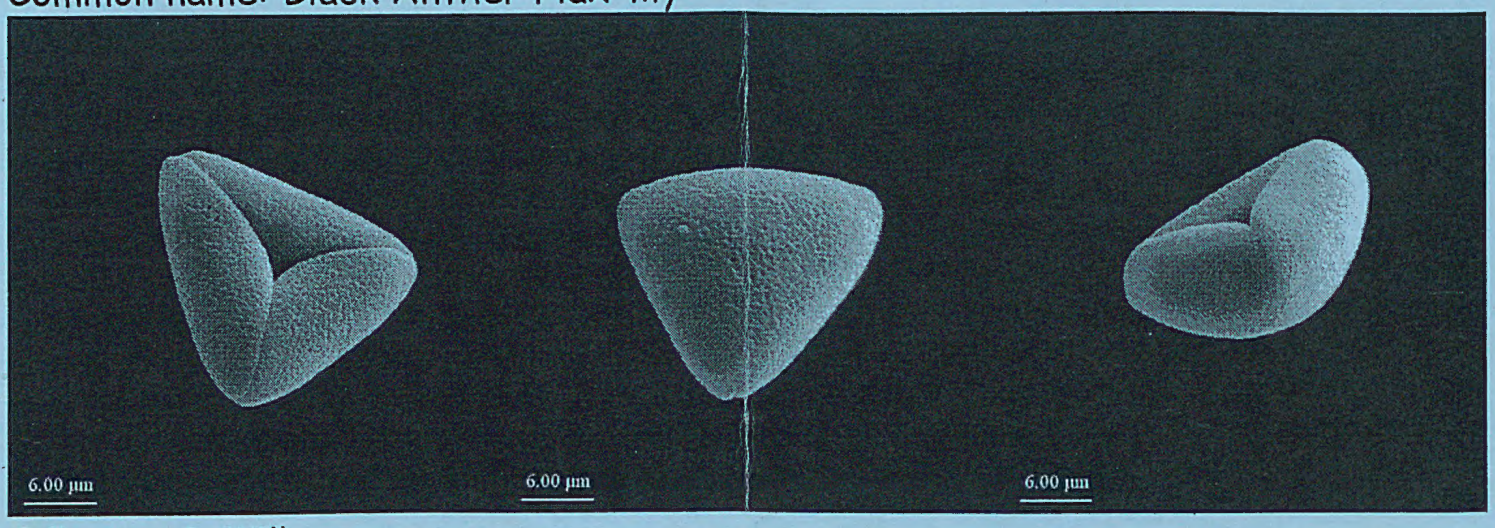
...continued from inside front cover

An insect (presumably) lands on the flower and by making a sound of a certain frequency, allows (forces?) the pollen grains to emerge through the tiny opening at the tip. The yellow base of the anthers could be a decoy. It looks like a pollen or other food reward but it isn't.
The image below is from the box-ironbark pollen data base at LaTrobe University Bendigo http://www.latrobe.edu.au/boxironbark/pollen/

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY, BENDIGO

Dianella revoluta

Family: Phormiaceae
Common name: Black Anther Flax-lily



Collector: S. Wilkens
Image production: K. Legge